DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 221 857 CS 207 126

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TITLE Fantasy-Reality Use of Mass Media by Children: A Longitudinal Study.
PUB DATE 81
NOTE 23p.
JOURNAL CIT Gazette: International Journal for Mass Communication Skills; v27 p83-103 1981

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adolescents; Elementary Secondary Education; *Fantasy; *Information Sources; Longitudinal Studies; *Mass Media Effects; *Media Research; *Television; Television Viewing
IDENTIFIERS *Fantasy Reality Dichotomy; *Media Use

ABSTRACT

A study of media use by children was conducted to produce an index of fantasy-reality orientation derived from the respondents' stated preferences for media content combined with their responses to a series of open-ended questions designed to tap the gratifications they claimed to receive from the media. Data were collected in three waves, when the subjects were 11-12, 13-14, and 15-16 on an initial panel of 632. Considering nonmedia as well as media sources of gratification indicated that with increasing age there is a greater reliance on the media as a source of both entertainment and news. An analysis of the extent to which the subjects changed categories over time revealed that a substantial number of them did concentrate their use predominately on fantasy-oriented gratifications. High fantasy use orientation was associated with females and to some extent with working class subjects, though findings for IQ and age of leaving school did not follow similar class-related patterns. The use of friends for leisure activity and information correlated with changes in media use orientation. In conclusion, though the concept of these two dichotomous categories may help researchers, the categories themselves may be misleading, particularly when they are used to study distinctions based upon social class. (JL)

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FANTASY-REALITY USE OF MASS MEDIA BY CHILDREN: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

By

David M. Smith

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ARTICLES

FANTASY-REALITY USE OF MASS MEDIA BY CHILDREN: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY

BY

DAVID M. SMITH

The emphasis of mass media research has always tended to be placed upon its effects, either upon individuals,[1] particular significant groups of the population,[2] or upon society as a whole.[3] The question of why mass media are attended to so avidly and frequently by their audiences has been less well developed. A body of research, usually referred to as the 'Uses and Gratifications' approach to mass communication, has attempted to consider this aspect of media behaviour.[4] Even the earliest studies from this perspective[5] were able to show that a medium, normally regarded as providing particular kinds of content, may nevertheless be used by its audience in ways not anticipated by the producers of that content. Studies of children adopting this approach have often laid emphasis upon the relationship of the amount and type of media content consumed to the extent to which the child's life is psychologically satisfying,[6] or have associated different uses of media with different social contexts.[7] Much of the empirical work, especially that concerned to demonstrate 'escapist' uses of the media, is open to serious criticism.[8] Far too frequently studies have been based on researchers' assumptions about the implications of consuming particular kinds of media content, rather than upon the respondents' own perspectives. This has led, in the past, to some over-emphasis upon the 'fantasy' elements of most popular media.

This over-emphasis is hardly surprising when one looks at the programming schedules for most media. Indeed, in Britain they are popularly referred to as entertainment media. Nevertheless, the focus upon the actor in 'uses and gratifications' research has meant that the informational-educative aspects of the media have also been considered. Indeed, as Weiss says:

> When... studies of uses and gratifications are carried out, the media or media-content are usually viewed dichotomously as predominantly fantasist-escapist, or informational-educational in significance.[9]

This dichotomy has been criticised in other work from the same tradition,[10] mainly on the grounds that more subtle distinctions are required. Nevertheless, the dichotomy is retained in the present

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work. I would argue, however, that the present work is significantly different from the traditional use of the dichotomy in two ways: it is concerned with the study of media and non-media sources of gratification (hereby placing media use in a wider context). Secondly, it is longitudinal and, as such, is able to plot media usage by the same respondents over time. There are also important methodological differences.

Methodology

The research reported here forms part of a longitudinal study of children, mass media and leisure instigated by the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, and financed by the Television Research Committee. The data was collected by interview and questionnaire in three waves, when the respondents were aged 11–12, 13–14 and 15–16, on an initial panel of 632.[11]

Although the fantasy-reality dichotomy is a much discussed aspect of 'uses and gratifications' research, a wide range of methods are utilized in this research, and this presents difficulties for the comparison and interpretation of results. Reality and Fantasy have been operationalised in essentially three different ways. One method of operationalising these concepts is that adopted by Schramm et al. as part of their investigation of how children use mass media.[12] The procedure is to define each mass medium to be considered in terms of what appears to be its typical content. Thus television is defined as Fantasy and print as Reality. Certain serious problems arise from this approach. It does not distinguish between the medium and its content. Yet the content of the media is dependent upon many variables, not least of which is the organisational structure of the media itself. What is more, the content of the medium may vary widely, between organisational structures within the medium – the *Beano* and *Look and Learn* are both comics, BBC radios 1 and 3 both radio stations devoted to music – and may be subject to changes over time. Furthermore, this approach takes no account of the audience's perspective and its ability to control, within limits, its consumption of media fare. Let us return to Schramm's distinction between print and television by way of illustration. A moderate consumer of both television and print may seek predominantly 'fantasy' material from both. Nevertheless he may be classified as less concerned to seek fantasy material than a high consumer of television who makes little use of print. By laying stress upon typical content of the medium one learns nothing about the actors' intentions. Though this approach clearly may have some value in research,

it is of the greatest importance that findings derived in this way are not assumed to reflect the intentions of the audience.[13]

Another approach which has been common in 'uses' research has been to concentrate upon the content of the medium. Thus within a given medium, types of content are distinguished, and preference for a particular type of content is assumed to be indicative of the gratifications to be derived. Research studies dealing with 'escapism' and mass media frequently adopt the technique. Types of content are assumed to have particular deleterious effects upon its audience, and the audience is studied in terms of these presumed effects.[14] To study the nature of the content of mass media consumed by different categories of people is in itself an interesting and potentially useful contribution to the study of media behaviour. However, it is insensitive to the audience's perceptions of the nature of the content and the gratifications they receive from consuming it. Himmelweit et al.[15] have shown that, although there is a measure of agreement, children in their sample tend to categorise television programmes in ways somewhat differently to those adopted by many researchers. If one is to assume that the nature of the content is indicative of how an audience makes use of it, then Himmelweit's findings suggest that in some cases children may derive gratifications other than those assumed by researchers. Indeed the same content may offer widely different gratifications to different members of the audience. The BBC's new Russian language series, 'Russian – Language and People', is educational and informative, but with songs and dramatisations it is also entertaining. The same content may even offer a range of gratifications to the individual audience member. He may watch 'Panorama' or 'TV Eye' for their informational value, but also gets enjoyment from the thrill and excitement of the news or from being able to forget or ignore his personal problems. Now one could argue that even if watched for some element of entertainment such content is bound to be informational as well. Schramm et al.[16] argue that most information gained from television is incidental. However, one must also acknowledge that predominantly entertaining content may offer information to particular sections of its audience, as in the case of the BBC radio serial, 'The Archers'.[17]

Distinctions drawn between types of content may have some validity. For the most part one can distinguish between fantasy-seeking content and reality-seeking content, at least in terms of the intentions of their producers. One must stress, however, that such research is studying media consumption behaviour from the perspective of the producers of media content from which one may or may not legitimately draw conclusions about the intentions of the audience.

It is not in any sense studying directly the audience's intentions.

A third procedure to be adopted by researchers has been to devise questions intended directly to tap uses and gratifications. Some of the earliest studies adopted this approach.[18] This method of inquiry has been used predominantly to describe ranges of use. A major limitation of this approach is that it relies upon the respondents' ability to verbalise. Though this is always a problem of interview-based research, it can be particularly serious where the questions tap relatively complicated themes. Thus, where the gratifications sought are thought to be difficult to verbalise, this method may not be thought to be appropriate. The problem is particularly marked when the respondents to be dealt with are from categories exhibiting limited verbal abilities, for example, young children.

The approach adopted in this paper is an attempt to utilise the most useful aspects of the second and third approaches above, and to combine them to produce an index of fantasy-reality orientation. The index is derived from the respondents' stated preferences for media content, combined with their responses to a series of open-ended questions designed to tap the gratifications they claimed to receive from the media. This method of construction reduces the extent to which differences in the ability to verbalise may influence the results. Yet it does not rely solely upon an externally imposed categorisation of media content. It is based also on children's definitions of their own use of the media. Thus, a child choosing, say, a television magazine programme as his favourite programme will score a point for reality (information). If he says he prefers it because of his factual content he scores another point. On the other hand, a variety programme would be defined as entertaining.

However, if the child claimed to gain information from it, he would score one point. The increasing verbal and intellectual abilities of our respondents over time, and our own attempts to improve our research instruments led to detailed changes in some questions upon which the index is based. The logic of the index however remains the same.

Fantasy-reality use of media and socio-demographic variables

Schramm, Lyle and Parker's classic American study of uses and gratifications deriving from television[19] makes much of the 'fantasy' emphasis of television content. Their study of sixth- and tenth-grade[20] schoolchildren found distinct associations between type of use of television and socio-cultural differences. In fact, they observed differences in use according to sex, socio-economic status and IQ.

I intend to look at each of these in turn in relation to my own data.

Schramm, Lyle and Parker observed differences according to sex in their sixth-grade sample but not in the tenth grade. In the sixth grade, girls are significantly more reality-orientated than are boys. The explanation offered for these findings is that girls change their media tastes generally earlier than boys. In this case, they begin to change to reality-seeking earlier than do the boys. By grade ten the boys have 'caught up' in this respect. However, such an argument assumes that use of media for reality-seeking increases with age! This seems at the very least questionable. Most adults surely use mass media predominantly for its 'fantasy' elements: i.e. for its entertainment value.[21] My own findings, presented in Table 1, do not at all support the American study's conclusions. Boys consistently fall more frequently into the reality-seeking group than do girls. Indeed, girls also appear more frequently than do boys in the high fantasy-seeking group. Neither do these findings suggest that there is any diminution in the relationship with increasing age. There is even some suggestion that even fewer older girls fall within the reality-seeking group. These differences may relate to cultural differences on either side of the Atlantic, but they are more likely to arise from the method used by the Americans to measure reality-seeking. I would argue that what Schramm et al. are measuring is the extent to which the sexes accept adult prescription as to what

Table 1. Reality-seeking/fantasy-seeking by sex

	High fantasy-seeking	Low fantasy-seeking	Reality-seeking	
Age 11–12				N = 632
Male	46.1[a]	38.1	15.8	100 (311)
Female	61.5	30.9	7.6	100 (321)
	χ^2 = 18.454, with 2 degrees of freedom			
Age 13–14				N = 592
Male	33.8	52.5	13.6	100 (292)
Female	63.1	34.6	2.3	100 (300)
	χ^2 = 61.028, with 2 degrees of freedom			
Age 15–16				N = 541
Male	28.5	56.9	14.7	100 (265)
Female	66.0	31.2	2.8	100 (276)
	χ^2 = 82.522, with 2 degrees of freedom			

[a] A statistical weighting procedure is used for the control of IQ, social class and sex, as appropriate.

are appropriate media to consume. If girls mature earlier than boys, one might reasonably expect them to adopt media which are particularly appropriate to adults rather than children (i.e. newspapers) earlier than do boys. My own findings seem to relate closely to the instrumental/expressive dichotomy of roles associated with the different sexes.[22] Boys in adopting instrumental roles make greater use of reality in the media than do girls who adopt expressive roles.

Schramm et al. also found differences according to socio-economic status.[23] In the sixth grade they observed that a greater proportion of low-status children fell into the fantasy group than of their middle-class counterparts. By the tenth grade they note that the differences have magnified. A third of the lower-status group fall into the fantasy category compared with only 8% of higher-status children. Similarly, nearly half of the high-status children fall into the reality category compared with only 15% of low-status children. Again, I would argue that Schramm is measuring normative presciptions about appropriate media rather than gratifications. It may also be that socio-economic groups within the two countries are not readily comparable in media behaviour. Certainly Himmelweit et al. found no comparable relationship between taste in television content and socio-economic status. Of course, the nature of the information sought may be different irrespective of the extent of its being sought. Nevertheless, the literature as a whole leads us to anticipate a somewhat greater tendency towards reality-seeking amongst the middle class. In this case, the present observations do support the general tenor of the literature (Table 2). At all ages studied, more middle-class respondents fall into the reality-seeking category.

Most studies agree that measured IQ is a major factor in determining media preferences. Schramm describes differences in fantasy- and reality-seeking behaviour due to differences in measured IQ as 'large and dramatic'.[24] However, it must be stressed that their observations reflect the greater emphasis by higher IQ children on newspapers and lower IQ children on television. They tell us nothing about use within a medium. My own findings, presented in Table 3, are consistent with their's only at the age of 13–14 years. At 11–12 years old, the high- and low-IQ respondents are surprisingly similar in their reported use of media, with the medium IQs being rather less committed to fantasy use, but little more inclined to reality-seeking than the others. By 13–14, high-IQ respondents are less likely to appear in the high fantasy category and low-IQ respondents in the reality-seeking category. However, by 15–16 years, the situation has somewhat reversed, for by that age high-IQ respondents are the least likely to be reality-seekers and low-IQ, the most likely.

Table 2. Reality-seeking/fantasy-seeking by social class

	High fantasy-seeking	Low fantasy-seeking	Reality-seeking	
Age 11–12				N = 632
Middle class	54.5[a]	30.4	15.1	100 (287)
Working class	55.7	35.5	8.7	100 (345)
	χ^2 = 6.797 with 2 degrees of freedom			
Age 13–14				N = 592
Middel class	46.8	44.3	8.9	100 (260)
Working class	48.0	45.7	6.3	100 (322)
	χ^2 = 1.435 with 2 degrees of freedom			
Age 15–16				
Middle class	47.8	42.0	10.3	100 (240)
Working class	47.2	45.4	7.4	100 (301)
	χ^2 = 1.600 with 2 degrees of freedom			

[a] A statistical weighting procedure is used for the control of IQ, social class and sex, as appropriate.

Table 3. Reality-seeking/fantasy-seeking by IQ

	High fantasy-seeking	Low fantasy-seeking	Reality-seeking	
Age 11–12				N = 632
High IQ	58.9[a]	29.4	11.7	100 (156)
Medium IQ	48.7	38.9	12.4	100 (290)
Low IQ	62.2	27.8	10.0	100 (186)
	χ^2 = 10.160 with 4 degrees of freedom			
Age 13–14				N = 592
High IQ	41.7	49.4	9.0	100 (139)
Medium IQ	49.0	41.8	9.3	100 (273)
Low IQ	50.2	46.0	3.8	100 (180)
	χ^2 = 7.487 with 4 degrees of freedom			
Age 15–16				N = 541
High IQ	45.7	47.5	6.8	100 (132)
Medium IQ	49.8	42.6	7.6	100 (250)
Low IQ	45.7	42.4	11.9	100 (159)
	χ^2 = 3.797 with 4 degrees of freedom			

[a] A statistical weighting procedure is used for the control of IQ, social class and sex, as appropriate.

How can we explain differences between findings and those of previous research? My main argument will be that those elements of fantasy- and reality-seeking which are being studied are sufficiently different to explain the results. Previous work has tended to concentrate either on the assumed nature of the media (i.e. television is fantasy; newspapers, reality) or upon the nature of media content. Thus, when Schramm et al. argue that sixth-grade girls are more reality-seeking than boys, this means that they are more likely to prefer those media which are conventionally considered to be purveyors of information about the real world. It does not mean that people perceive themselves as utilising that media for that purpose.

Media and non-media sources of gratification

A problem which frequently arises in the interpretation of media research is the validity of observations based exclusively upon the media. Klapper[25] has pointed to what he regards as the unfortunate trend in media research to generalise about behaviour on the basis of empirical findings relating only to media behaviour. In discussing the reality orientation of children in the context of their media use, we are saying nothing about their underlying needs for reality material. The child who uses media essentially for gratifications of a fantastic nature may be a dedicated searcher after knowledge. Indeed, his searching after knowledge may even drive him to seek fantasy gratifications from the media by way of relief. We can only learn something of that person's overall orientation to the 'fantastic' or the 'real' by reference to his behaviour in non-media contexts as well as media ones. In part, this problem arises from the apparent tacit assumption of researchers that the media possess peculiar powers. As Klapper[26] argues, a walk in the country and watching a television programme may each be entertaining – even escapist – and informative or both.

In the present study the index of fantasy-reality media use is related to non-media sources of gratification on the basis of two questions. One deals with sources of entertainment; the other with sources of information. All respondents were asked during the course of the interview to indicate their preference between the media as sources of entertainment. They were then asked whether there were any ways of being entertained they preferred in addition to the media. This question allowed respondents to offer no preference other than mass media or to add an additional source of entertainment. Since media are recognised as an important source of entertain-

ment (see below) one feels justified in the choice allowed within the question; otherwise the likelihood of receiving predominantly media answers is very high. A similar technique is used in the question relating to information. Because of the wide range of subjects on which information might be sought, it was decided to restrict the analysis to one type of information which it was felt would generally be sought. Respondents were asked about their use of television as a source of information about things in the news and then asked where else they learned what was in the news.

There is little previous work which can inform the analysis. The main concern is to attempt to draw out relationships, or indeed the lack of them, between those gratifications deriving from the media and the use of non-media sources of gratifications of the same type. We will look first at the findings contained in Table 4 relating to sources of information (news). For all children, newspapers tend to be the predominant source of news. Already high at age 11–12 years, they are chosen by even more children with increasing age. At each age studied, slightly more reality-orientated children mention newspapers than do the others, but the differences are small.

Table 4. Sources of information (news)

	High fantasy-seeking	Low fantasy-seeking	Reality-seeking
Age 11–12	N = 342	N = 217	N = 73
TV only	20.47%	20.28%	0.00%
Newspapers	47.66%	53.46%	57.53%
Other media	13.16%	17.05%	24.66%
School	12.57%	5.53%	6.85%
Other people	8.18%	8.75%	16.44%
Participating	0.00%	0.00%	1.37%
Age 13–14	N = 289	N = 255	N = 48
TV only	11.07%	12.55%	4.17%
Newspapers	64.71%	67.06%	70.83%
Other media	10.45%	10.19%	10.41%
School	6.57%	5.10%	6.25%
Other people	8.65%	9.02%	10.42%
Participating	1.73%	0.39%	2.08%
Age 15–16	N = 256	N = 239	N = 46
TV only	9.77%	10.83%	6.52%
Newspapers	75.39%	74.90%	80.43%
Other media	8.98%	3.77%	8.69%
School	3.52%	2.51%	0.00%
Other people	5.96%	7.12%	4.35%
Participating	1.95%	2.51%	0.00%

The most marked difference between reality-orientated and fantasy-orientated children is in their degree of dependence on television for news. This difference is most marked at age 11–12, when no child in the reality category mentions only TV, compared with at least 20% of the others. As the children become older there is a slight increase in the proportion of reality-orientated children who mention only TV, and a reduction in the proportion of fantasy-orientated children. Children in the reality category show a marked tendency to become more dependent upon the media as a whole as they become older. Less than 5% of the 15–16 year olds mention a non-media source of news. A similar trend, though less pronounced, may be observed for children in the high fantasy category. Those in the low fantasy category rely mainly on the media throughout with little change.

The findings presented in Table 5 indicate that with increasing age there is a greater reliance on the media as a source of entertainment as well as news. Children with a reality orientation towards media usage are somewhat less likely to prefer to seek entertainment only from television than are other children. Instead, at age 11–12 they have relatively high scores on indoor activities, which presumably compete directly with mass media for attention, and on outdoor activities. However, these differences disappear as the children get older. With increasing age the preference for both indoor and outdoor activities decreases for all children.

In looking at these two uses of the media there appears to be a somewhat contradictory position developing. At age 11–12 there are differences between reality- and fantasy-orientated children in the sample. With increasing age these differences disappear. Also with increasing age there is an increasing dependence on media rather than non-media outlets for both news and entertainment. If the results are similar (i.e. that the media play a greater part in their life as they enter adolescence), the reasons are, I suggest, somewhat different. In both areas the explanation can be found in the changes in leisure and work patterns. In the leisure field the increasing importance of peer group relationships and a marked increase in heterosexual activities with age lay greater stress upon the impedimenta associated with such activities – namely the impedimenta of pop culture. Since the media in the form of pop records, pop music on radio and television, and pop magazines are a major source of this material, an increasing reliance on them as a leisure aid is perhaps not surprising. Thus, I am not suggesting that the respondents replace social activities with the media but rather that the media increasingly becomes part of those social activities.

Table 5. Leisure behaviour preference

	High fantasy-seeking	Low fantasy-seeking	Reality-seeking
Age 11–12	N = 342	N = 217	N = 73
Don't prefer anything to media	41.80%	45.67%	32.88%
Cultural activities	11.70%	8.76%	5.48%
Indoor activities	29.24%	24.88%	34.25%
Outdoor activities	11.11%	12.44%	17.81%
Sport	2.05%	3.23%	4.11%
Sundry uncodeables	4.09%	4.61%	5.48%
Age 13–14	N = 289	N = 255	N = 48
Don't prefer anything to media	56.74%	50.27%	54.17%
Indoor activities	26.29%	25.88%	22.92%
Outdoor activities	7.95%	12.15%	8.33%
Sport	2.45%	1.96%	8.33%
Sundry uncodeables	6.92%	17.43%	6.25%
Age 15–16	N = 256	N = 239	N = 46
Don't prefer anything to media	63.28%	65.69%	63.04%
Cultural activities	5.08%	5.02%	4.35%
Indoor activities	5.47%	3.77%	6.52%
Outdoor activities	0.00%	0.84%	0.00%
Sport	5.08%	8.79%	6.52%
Be with friends	10.94%	5.86%	10.87%
Dancing	5.08%	3.77%	2.17%
Sundry uncodeables	4.69%	6.28%	8.70%

That the media becomes increasingly important as a source of news is perhaps also not surprising given other changes affecting the respondents. The main media sources of news are school and other people. School is initially more frequently mentioned by 'high fantasy' children. Other people is more frequently mentioned by 'reality' children. In both cases the proportions reduce over time. There are, I suggest, two factors operating here. For school-leavers the school as a source of information about the news is not available for the final wave of data. For those still at school the pressure of examinations and the discipline of academic subjects makes it increasingly difficult to discuss such matters in the school framework and also places pressure of time upon the children. Both these factors will encourage the greater use of media by children as a source of news.

In summary, it can be said that at age 11–12, reality-orientated

children differed from fantasy-orientated children in the following ways. They were more likely to mention media other than television as a source of news, but were not more likely to mention a non-media source of news. They were less likely to say they preferred media to non-media sources of entertainment. One might characterise these children as those who do not make great demands upon the media for 'fantasy' type material, but who do seek 'reality' type media from a wide variety of media. They appear to define the media as more important as a source of reality material but they do not seek this kind of material from other sources any more than do other children. As they move through adolescence, the media become increasingly important to them as a source of entertainment. At the same time, other children, whose orientation to the media is more towards fantasy- than reality-seeking usage, nevertheless, increasingly define the media as an important source of news. For all children, then, the media became more important as sources of both kinds of material. The index indicates the way in which respondents define the relative importance to them of the media as a source of each type of material.

Fantasy-reality use: changes over time

The value of longitudinal study is that one is enabled to study not only differences in the distribution of population within social categories over time but also how individuals move between these categories. In the discussion so far, I have noted that in each age range the use of mass media in particular ways is associated with membership of particular social groups. I now wish to look in detail at the dynamics of this relationship. In doing so a different type of question is asked of the data. We want to know whether respondents who change their category of use over time exhibit different characteristics to those whose pattern of usage remains fairly constant. This gives important information of two kinds. It tells us how consistent uses are over time; it gives us more sophisticated data on the relationship of uses to socio-demographic variables. It is to illucidate the general pattern of their use that the index of fantasy-reality use was constructed. One can now ask whether children's pattern of use changes over time and, if so, what characteristics do such children exhibit. Secondly, in studying those whose use changes over time, we are able to understand better those whose use patterns do not change.

Extent to which respondents change categories. Let us first examine the extent to which individuals remain within the same use categories over time. Although the proportion of respondents falling into the reality-use category is similar for each wave of interviewing, only one respondent remained in that category throughout the study. There is, then, a considerable amount of movement between categories – in particular, between the reality and low fantasy category. This movement is two-way. However, counterpoised to this finding is the observation that a substantial number of respondents (98) do remain in the high fantasy category throughout the period of the study. A further sizeable group (53) move from high fantasy towards the reality end of the index at age 13–14, only to return to the fantasy category at age 15–16. We may conclude, then, that while the children, with one exception, appear not to concentrate their use of media on reality-orientated gratifications, a substantial number of them do concentrate their use predominantly on fantasy-orientated gratifications. For this reason, the analysis will concentrate on respondents who intially fall into the high fantasy category of the index. The next section deals with two aspects of the data. It looks at changes over time for those respondents who at age 11–12 fall into the high fantasy category, and then relates these findings to the relationships between media usage and socio-economic and cultural factors.

Changes in media use and socio-economic and cultural factors. I wish to investigate the ways in which respondents who remain in the high fantasy category on media use differ from their counterparts whose use changes over time. Four groups of respondents are investigated:

1) Respondents whose use has changed from the high fantasy category to low fantasy or reality use by the age of 13–14.
2) Respondents whose use has changed from the high fantasy category to low fantasy or reality use by the age of 15–16.
3) Respondents whose use has changed from the high fantasy category to low fantasy or reality use by the age of 13–14, but who return to the high fantasy category by the age of 15–16.
4) Respondents who remain in the high fantasy category throughout the study.

A preference for high fantasy use of mass media is associated with being female rather than male. This was noted in Table 2. Table 6 shows that this relationship holds when individual changes are con-

sidered. The vast majority of respondents who remained in the high fantasy use category throughout were female. Respondents who at age 13–14 moved towards the reality end of index and then returned to high fantasy use were twice as likely to be female as male. On the other hand, respondents who though at age 11–12 were in the high fantasy category and who then changed towards the reality end of index were twice as likely to be male. One can conclude, therefore, that females are more likely to use media as a source of fantasy gratifications than are males, and are more likely to continue to use them in this way over time.

Table 6. Changes in media use by sex

Use categories	N	Male	Female
(1)	55	69.01% (38)	30.09% (17)
(2)	63	46.03% (29)	53.97% (34)
(3)	53	39.62% (21)	60.38% (32)
(4)	98	19.39% (19)	80.06% (79)

High fantasy orientation in use of mass media is also associated to some extent with being working class. In Table 2, it was noted that in each age range the middle-class respondents were slightly more likely to fall into the reality category of use. Table 7 shows that childeren who have moved from the high fantasy category towards the reality end of the index by the second stage of interviewing exhibit no differences by social class. However, in all other groups studied the working class predominate.

Table 7. Changes in media use by social class

Use categories	N	Middle class	Working class
(1)	55	49.01% (27)	50.09% (28)
(2)	63	39.68% (25)	60.32% (38)
(3)	53	35.85% (19)	64.15% (34)
(4)	98	42.86% (42)	57.14% (56)

It can be concluded, therefore, that working-class respondents are more likely to remain in the high fantasy category and that of those who do move from the category, working-class respondents do so at a later age than do the middle class. However, once again, no similar pattern of relationships is observed for IQ (Table 8). Another factor which one might expect to vary in a similar pattern

Table 8. Changes in media use by measured IQ

Use categories	N	High IQ	Medium IQ	Low IQ
(1)	55	34.55% (19)	36.36% (20)	29.09% (16)
(2)	63	23.81% (15)	33.33% (21)	42.86% (27)
(3)	53	32.08% (17)	32.08% (17)	35.85% (19)
(4)	98	20.41% (20)	53.06% (52)	26.53% (26)

to social class is age of leaving school. However, like IQ, the findings for this variable do not parallel those for social class. The findings are considered separately for those children who have left school at age 15–16 and those who have not. A very small number of respondents who had left school but were now students of other educational establishments were considered separately. Table 9 shows that respondents who changed from high fantasy towards a more reality orientation were twice as likely to be pupils (i.e. still at school) than leavers. However, this does not mean that remaining at school is associated with reality orientation to the media. The data also indicate that those respondents who remained in the high fantasy category throughout the period of study contained a greater proportion of pupils than leavers.

Table 9. Changes in media use by school-leaving status

Use categories	N	Leaver	Student	Pupil
(1)	55	32.07% (18)	3.64% (2)	63.54% (35)
(2)	63	47.06% (30)	1.59% (1)	50.79% (32)
(3)	53	47.01% (25)	3.77% (2)	49.05% (26)
(4)	98	43.08% (43)	0.00% (0)	56.02% (55)

Changes in media use and changes in leisure patterns and sources of information. Once again in studying the relationship between media and non-media pursuits two aspects are considered: leisure preferences and sources of information. Leisure is considered first (see Table 10). Respondents who moved towards reality orientation of media at age 13–14 and those who did so at age 15–16 were rather more likely to prefer media as a source of entertainment at the age 11–12 than were other groups of respondents, but were less likely to prefer media at age 13–14. No differences in the extent of media preferences were noted at age 15–16, but by this age a considerable proportion of all respondents gave media as preferred leisure

Table 10a. Media use and leisure behaviour preferences (age 11–12)

Total	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	N = 55	N = 63	N = 53	N = 98
Don't prefer	41.82% (23)	36.51% (23)	30.19% (16)	31.63% (31)
Other media	3.64% (2)	11.11% (7)	1.89% (0)	7.14% (7)
Books	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)
All media	45.46%	47.62%	32.98%	38.77%
Cultural (theatre)	10.90% (6)	9.52% (6)	15.09% (8)	11.22% (11)
Indoor activities	25.45% (14)	28.57% (18)	37.74% (20)	30.61% (30)
Outdoor activities	9.09% (5)	9.52% (6)	11.32% (6)	13.27% (13)
Football	1.82% (1)	1.59% (1)	1.89% (1)	1.02% (1)
Sundry uncode-ables	7.27% (4)	3.17% (2)	1.89% (1)	5.10% (5)

Table 10b. Media use and leisure behaviour preferences (age 13–14)

Total	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	N = 55	N = 63	N = 53	N = 98
Don't prefer	38.18% (21)	47.76% (30)	49.06% (26)	52.04% (51)
Other media	3.64% (2)	7.94% (5)	3.77% (2)	4.08% (4)
Books	1.82% (1)	1.59% (1)	0.00% (0)	1.02% (1)
All media	33.64%	47.29%	51.83%	57.14%
Indoor activities	32.73% (18)	28.57% (18)	20.75% (11)	30.61% (30)
Outdoor activities	14.55% (8)	7.94% (5)	13.21% (7)	4.08% (4)
Football	1.82% (1)	3.17% (2)	1.89% (1)	0.00% (0)
Sundry uncode-ables	7.27% (4)	3.17% (2)	11.32% (6)	8.16% (8)

Table 10c. Media use and leisure behaviour preferences (age 15–16)

Total	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	N = 55	N = 63	N = 53	N = 98
Don't prefer	61.18% (34)	66.67% (42)	58.85% (31)	62.24% (61)
Indoor activities	9.09% (5)	1.59% (1)	7.55% (4)	5.10% (5)
Sport	9.09% (5)	7.94% (5)	9.43% (5)	1.02% (1)
Outdoor activities	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)
Be with friends	9.09% (5)	3.17% (2)	13.21% (7)	13.27% (13)
Cultural	5.45% (3)	6.35% (4)	1.89% (1)	5.10% (5)
Dancing	1.82% (1)	6.35% (4)	3.77% (2)	6.12% (6)
NAG	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	3.77% (2)	2.04% (2)
Sundry uncode-ables	5.45% (3)	7.94% (5)	1.89% (1)	7.14% (7)

source. These differences may, in part, relate to a lack of preference by those moving towards a more reality orientation for indoor activities at age 11–12, which decreases with age. Thus, those children at age 11–12 are more likely to prefer indoor activities which do not include the media.

An interesting difference, though a small one, arises at age 15–16 in connection with friends. Children who tend to remain in the high fantasy category throughout the period of the study or who return to it by age 15–16 are more likely to mention being with friends as a preferred means of entertaining themselves. In Table 11, it will be seen that those children who are moving towards a more reality orientation by the age of 13–14 are more likely than others

Table 11a. Media use and sources of information (age 11–12)

Total	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	N = 55	N = 63	N = 53	N = 98
TV only	27.27% (15)	19.05% (12)	16.98% (9)	22.45% (22)
Newspapers	41.18% (23)	46.03% (29)	47.17% (25)	52.04% (51)
Books	1.82% (1)	1.59% (1)	0.00% (0)	1.02% (1)
Other media	9.09% (5)	22.22% (14)	9.43% (5)	9.18% (9)
School	9.09% (5)	12.70% (8)	16.98% (9)	9.18% (9)
Relatives	3.64% (2)	4.76% (3)	3.77% (2)	6.12% (6)
Friends	3.64% (2)	6.34% (4)	3.77% (2)	2.04% (2)
Participating	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)
Sundry uncodeable	3.64% (2)	0.00% (0)	3.99% (2)	0.00% (0)

Table 11b. Media use and sources of information (age 13–14)

Total	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	N = 55	N = 63	N = 53	N = 98
TV only	12.73% (7)	7.94% (5)	18.87% (10)	5.10% (5)
Newspapers	67.27% (37)	61.90% (39)	56.60% (30)	69.39% (68)
Books	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	2.04% (2)
Other media	10.91% (6)	14.29% (9)	7.55% (4)	9.18% (9)
School	1.82% (1)	6.55% (4)	5.66% (3)	9.18% (9)
Relatives	3.64% (2)	4.76% (3)	7.55% (4)	5.10% (5)
Friends	5.45% (3)	4.76% (3)	5.66% (3)	4.08% (4)
Participating	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	1.02% (1)
Sundry uncodeables	1.82% (1)	1.59% (1)	3.77% (2)	0.00% (0)

Table 11c. Media use and sources of information (age 15–16)

Total	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	N = 55	N = 63	N = 53	N = 98
TV only	7.27% (4)	17.46% (11)	11.32% (6)	9.18% (9)
Newspapers	74.55% (41)	73.02% (46)	79.25% (42)	75.51% (74)
Books	0.00% (0)	0.00% (0)	1.89% (1)	0.00% (0)
Other media	5.45% (3)	4.76% (3)	9.43% (5)	9.18% (9)
Relatives	0.00% (0)	1.59% (1)	0.00% (0)	1.02% (1)
Friends	9.09% (5)	3.17% (2)	3.77% (2)	6.12% (6)
Participating	1.82% (1)	1.59% (1)	0.00% (0)	3.06% (3)
Sundry uncodeable	1.82% (1)	0.00% (0)	1.89% (1)	0.00% (0)

to mention friends as a source of information. The use of friends by different groups of 15–16 year olds in very different ways may offer some insights for the current debate concerning 'youth culture'. This might lead us to speculate that different groups of children relate to their peers in very different ways and that the nature of the 'subculture', if indeed there is one, of their peer group may be a function of their structural position within society.

Conclusions

In conclusion, I wish to take up two points which have arisen from the findings. What does the study of the dynamics of media usage tell us about the usefulness of the categories employed? Secondly, what do the findings on the relationships between use and social class, IQ and school-leaving age contribute to the debate on mass culture.

Let us deal first with the usefulness of the terms 'fantasy' and 'reality' use for the development of research. Schramm, Lyle and Parker, in their pioneer American study of children's uses of television, say:

> We defined the chief needs for which children go to television as the needs for *fantasy* and *reality experiences*. And by comparing pretelevision with television behaviour we were able to show that it is overwhelmingly the *fantasy* needs of children which television is meeting.[37]

I discussed above some of the serious problems involved in operationalising this distinction. Mass communications research, steeped

as it is in the positivist tradition, tends to rely on imposed categories for the analysis of the data. I have attempted in this work to place greater emphasis on the child's perception of whether or not its mass media use is fantasy- or reality-orientated. The findings on the whole suggest that such terms do have some meaning. The use of the terms arose from the data collected. I have shown that certain types of children tend towards a reality orientation towards media use and others towards a fantasy orientation. However, at the same time I would argue that to treat these terms as meaningful and significant categories to be imposed upon respondents under investigation may be misleading. These data suggest that children switch between these uses over time. Mass media experiences might better be seen as involving a richness of gratifications, involving aspects of the child's 'real' and 'fantasy' worlds. If we accept this picture of media use, then 'static' studies of children falling into one or the other of these categories of use at a given moment in time may be of value in better understanding the processes by which they receive gratifications. However, the wider implication of the findings suggests the need for more work concerned with studying the process of media use rather than studies which seek to investigate particular kinds of media gratifications.

The mass culture debate involves critics of a wide political spectrum: ranging from elitists condemning the decline of traditional 'high' cultures to anti-elitists arguing for the development of new 'mass' cultural forms. Essentially the debate revolves around the associations between 'political democratization', the 'Mass Society' concept and the concomitant development of mass culture.[28] An assumption common to this work appears to be the increasingly widespread availability and acceptance of 'working-class cultures' or, at least, 'low cultures relating to the working class'. Edward Shills, for example, argues the following:

> Together, these classes (the industrial working class and the rural population) consume almost nothing of the inheritance and current production of superior culture. Very little mediocre culture of the conventional sort reaches them except in such periodicals as *Life*, *Look* and *The Reader's Digest*. Much of their culture as transmitted by mass media is brutal – crime films and television spectaculars, paperbacks of violence, pornographic oral and printed literature, and the culture of the world of sport.[29]

Shills himself admits that mass media represent only a limited aspect of working-class 'culture'. Yet the impression remains that working-class people in contemporary society operate on the basis of a culture or subcultures which are 'inferior' to high culture – by which

is meant the culture of intellectual elites. Thus, the working class are portrayed as people of 'lower' tastes and having few intellectual skills.

Discussions of working-class cultures persist amongst sociologists – fed by such work as that by Basil Bernstein and his followers, whose work might be interpreted as demonstrating the limited verbal and cognitive skills which account for their lack of desire to seek either knowledge or intellectual refinement. Whilst contributing to this debate only tangentially, these findings do offer some contribution. What is perhaps most noticeable about the findings is the lack of differences arising from IQ or from age of school leaving, and the very weak relationship between social class and fantasy use of mass media. Clearly, use of mass media for its fantasy elements does not closely relate to working-classness, and therefore cannot be presumed to be a specifically working-class cultural trait. Of course, this could be seen as compatable with some aspects of the mass culture debate. One of the concerns of such writers is that elites become culturally swamped by non-elites and increasingly become consumers of mediocre or, what Shills calls, brutal culture. I have no evidence for this point. Neither can one say whether the fantasy or reality consumption of middle-class children may not differ from that of their working-class peers. What is clear from these findings is that the mass media cannot be seen only as purveyors of fantasy material for the working class. Most children tend to use the media for gratifications of both a fantasy and reality type.

NOTES

1. As in the numerous psychological studies of media effect.
2. Note for example the preponderance of studies of children, and the association of supposedly deleterious effects with 'prone' groups within the population.
3. For example, the emphasis on semiotic research, and the growing interest of Marxist sociology in the ideological functions of the media.
4. For an extensive review of this literature see J. G. Blumler and E. Katz, 'The uses of mass communications: current perspectives on gratifications research', *Sage Annual Reviews of Communication Research* 3 (1974).
5. See for example: B. Berelson, 'What "missing the newspaper" means', in P. F. Lazarsfeld and F. N. Stanton (eds.), *Communications Research* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1949). H. Herzog, 'Professor quiz: a gratification study', in P. F. Lazarsfeld and F. N. Stanton (eds.), *Radio Research, 1941* (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1942).
6. See, for example, H. Himmelweit, A. N. Oppenheim, and P. Vince, *Television and the Child* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).
7. See for example, M. W. Riley and J. Riley, 'A sociological approach to

communication research', in W. Schramm (ed.), *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1965), pp. 389–401.

8. E. Katz and D. Foulkes, 'On the use of mass media, for 'escape': clarification of a concept', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 26 (1962).
9. W. Weiss, 'Mass communication', *Annual Review of Psychology* 22 (1971).
10. See, for example, D. McQuail, J. G. Blumler, and J. R. Brown, 'The television audience: a revised perspective', in D. McQuail (ed.), *Sociology of Mass Communications* (Harmundsworth: Penguin, 1972); E. Katz, M. Gurevitch, and H. Haas, 'On the use of mass media for important things', *American Sociological Review* 38 (1973).
11. For a fuller discussion of the Methodology, see David M. Smith, 'Children, mass media and excitement: an empirical study', *Gazette* 23, no. 2 (1977).
12. W. Schramm, J. Lyle, and E. B. Parker, *Television in the Lives of Our Children* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961).
13. Other examples can be found in: E. Maccoby, 'Why children watch television', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 15 (1951); J. W. C. Johnstone, 'Social structure and patterns of mass media consumption', unpublished PhD dissertation, University of Chicago, 1961.
14. See, for example: W. R. Hazard, 'Some personal and social influences on telecast viewing', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 26 (1962); and L. Pearlin, 'Social and personal stress and escape television viewing', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 23 (1959).
15. Himmelweit et al., *Television and the Child*.
16. Ibid.
17. 'The Archers' is a radio serial broadcast on BBC radio 4. It is essentially a 'soap opera', but was originally conceived by the BBC as a means of communicating certain general information to farmers.
18. H. Herzog, 'Motivations and gratifications of daily serial listeners', in W. Schramm (ed.), *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1965).
19. Ibid.
20. Approximately 11–15 years old.
21. Another classic study, that of Himmelweit et al. *(Television and the Child)*, observed differences in the kind of factual information sought.
22. T. Parsons and R. F. Bales, *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process* (Glencoe, Il: The Free Press, 1955).
23. The association between high socio-economic status and 'reality' use has found support in subsequent years, i.e. P. J. Tichenor, G. A. Donohue, and C. N. Olien, 'Mass media flow and differential growth of knowledge', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 34 (1970). However, it has recently been questioned by other American research. See B. K. L. Genova and B. S. Greenberg, 'Interests in news and the knowledge gap', *Public Opinion Quarterly* 43 (1979).
24. Schramm et al., *Television in the Lives*, p. 105.
25. J. T. Klapper, *The Effects of Mass Communication* (New York: The Free Press, 1966).
26. Ibid.
27. Schramm et al., *Television in the Lives*, p. 170.
28. S. Hall and P. Whannel, *The Popularists* (London: Hutchinson, 1964).
29. E. Shills, 'Mass society and its culture', in N. Jacobs (ed.), *Culture for the Millions?: Mass Media in Modern Society* (New York: van Nostrand, 1959), p. 11.